

BEFORE Saturday's deciding match between Wycombe and Dagenham, there was an equally important battle on Thursday when the Rothmans Isthmian League leaders Enfield, took on the Essex club at Southbury Road. The match was of vital importance to Wycombe, for only after Thursday's game, did they know what was demanded of them on Saturday (writes Stuart Earp).

Wanderers fans must have been hoping the other big two would draw — and a coachload of Wycombe supporters made the journey to witness the game. But those hopes of a stalemate were shattered to the tune of a 4-1 Enfield victory.

That effectively ended Dagenham's chances of the championship and it was left to the Blues to win on Saturday for the title.

Enfield reserved one of the best performances of the season for their final game — and on this display it was not difficult to see just why they had topped the table for six months. They dictated events for all but 15 minutes of the encounter and made Dagenham look an extremely ordinary outfit.

They should have gone ahead in only the second minute when Brian Wilson, surely a candidate for Enfield's player of the year, headed against the upright and saw the ball bounce back into Ian Huttley's grateful arms.

Enfield 4, Dagenham 1

Those Wycombe supporters were soon making themselves heard on the far side of the ground, chanting the name of their club and making more noise than either set of rival fans. But their chants turned from Wycombe to Dagenham after Enfield took the lead in the 12th minute. Fred Callaghan pumped a high ball upfield and as Dagenham's defence struggled for pace, the speedy Derek Baker nipped in and sent a lobbied shot into the far corner in-off the right hand upright.

Enfield increased their lead in the 23rd minute. Peter Cruse bent a corner into the six yard box where Wilson distracted the defence and forced Jim Holder to head past his own 'keeper.

Dagenham, with two strong but slow centre-backs in Norman Welch and Dennis Moore, were made to look awfully short of pace by coloured striker Dennis Gill and Baker, who threatened every time they were in possession. The Dagenham defence strangely refused to commit themselves and thus gave the home strikers all the time and room they needed. Before half-time little John Tone hit the crossbar after a typical break by Gill.

Enfield were facing a stiff breeze in the second half and Dagenham took full advantage of the elements in the first quarter of the half. They needed goals, and fast, to get themselves back into the game and they were rewarded with 51 minutes gone. A long ball from Paul Currie was only half cleared by Tony Jennings and fell to Holder. He had two shots, the first blocked and the second too hot for Mick Lowe to handle. Mal Harkins nipping in to slot home the loose ball.

The match grew a little heated in the second half and Gill became the 15th Enfield player to go into the book this season when he went in too hard on the prostrate Huttley. Soon afterwards Kenny Gaine replaced Baker for what was to prove a valuable substitution.

It was Gaine who made sure Enfield would finish with 95 points when he landed the third goal. Cruse dummied the defence, leaving Tone with a clear route to the bye-line. With the back four badly stretched, Gaine had time to steady himself before slotting home the inevitable cross.

Another flare-up followed and there was a warning that the match would be stopped if stones continued to be thrown onto the pitch at one end of the ground. The warning was heeded.

Yet another lightning break by Enfield completed the scoreline 11 minutes from time. Les Eason cleared from defence to the effective Cruse. He sent a 40 yard ball through the defence to Gaine who took the ball around Huttley and crashed home the final goal.

On this form, it was difficult to see why Enfield, who were 10 points clear of Wycombe at one stage, did not win the title. But if they keep together the same squad over the summer months, it's a good bet they'll be around next season.

ENFIELD: M. Lowe; A. Jennings, P. Fry, B. Wilson, F. Callaghan; L. Eason, J. Tone, P. Cruse, M. O'Sullivan; D. Baker (sub. K. Gaine 67 mins.), D. Gill.

DAGENHAM: I. Huttley; A. Rosethoen, D. Moore, N. Welch, J. Lye; J. Borland, J. Holder, K. Gray; M. Harkins, N. Fox, J. Dear. Sub. M. Springett (not used).

Referee: R. Lewis (Great Bookham).
Half-time: 2-0. **Goalscorers:** Enfield — Baker (12), Holder o.g. (23), Gaine 2 (70, 79).